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AMONG THE KAZAKH ATHEISTS

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Following is the translation of an article by V. Akshinskiy in Agitator (The Agitator), No 13, July 1961, pages 49-52.

Recently, in some oblasts of the Kazakh Republic, there has been evidence of heightened activity on the part of sectarian preachers, mullahs, and other religious teachers. They have succeeded in enmeshing certain gullible individuals, largely aged and illiterate women, in their cobwebs.

In response to this activity, the Party organizations in the Republic have considerably intensified their program of scientific-atheistic propaganda among the population. Lecturers, propagandists, and agitators have begun to speak more frequently on anti-religious subjects and to devote more time to individual work with believers. They have begun to encourage public attendance in atheistic club-houses and lecture halls as well as small mobile planetariums. Factories, kolkhozes (collective farms), and sovkhoses (state farms) are holding question-and-answer sessions for believers and atheists, as well as special discussions accompanied by demonstrations on such themes as "Miracles Without Miracles". Newspapers, magazines, and radio have begun to increase their dissemination of atheistic materials.

The training of atheists has been placed on a sound footing in the Karagandinskaya Oblast. The Party education network in this Oblast alone has 55 functioning circles and seminars on the study of the foundations of scientific atheism; about two thousand persons participate in these activities. There are seven schools of atheism which enroll approximately 200 agitators.

Over 1500 atheistic agitators are conducting individual work with believers in factories, mines, kolkhozes, and sovkhoses. Believers are encouraged to take part in socio-political activities and are offered an opportunity of listening to readings of newspaper articles and lectures. These varied efforts are yielding positive results. Many

believers are gradually beginning to free themselves from their religious prejudices. Let us cite one example of this. Anna Paff, a formerly staunch sect member, for a long time failed to respond to the arguments put forth by atheists. The agitators patiently and insistently attempted to influence her mind which had been poisoned by the preachers. Gradually, Anna Paff began to get interested in books, and then decided to visit the motion picture theater; finally, she plucked up enough courage to attend an open-air dance. When the first ice was broken, she was assisted in finding a job. There came a time when Anna was ready to enter the Komsomol. Upon joining this organization, she decided to leave her family in the town of Saran' and move out to a village where she is still working successfully.

One of the important tasks of atheistic agitators is to work off our youth from the influences of the religious sects. Many towns and villages in the Oblast have organized atheistic circles and lecture series for parents, conducted readers' conferences, and presented atheistic motion pictures; there are frequent presentations on such themes as "Who are the Sectarrians?", "On the Origin of Islam", "The Church as a Means of Repressing Women", etc. In the town of Temir-Tau there was a public trial attended by pupils and teachers condemning the organizers of an underground household monastery who refused to permit their children to attend school.

As a result of these fruitful efforts, many children who under the influence of religious parents formerly failed to participate in school activities and to attend motion pictures have now become activists and enrolled in Pioneer or Komsomol organizations.

Examples of the beneficial effects of atheistic propaganda may also be found in other Oblasts in the Republic. The experiment in carrying on agitation work among believers in their native language in the Alma-Atinskaya Oblast is worthy of mention. The atheists succeeded not only in rescuing many people from the clutches of the religious witch-hunters, but even in persuading them to take an active part in anti-religious work. Evidence of this may be found in the statements made by persons who have broken away from religion in the press, radio, and television. Among the people who have renounced their faith are Pentacostalists Sotnikov, Zhorkov, and Pankratov, Jehovah's Witness Pankovich, Imam of the Karaganda Mosque Abdykadir Iminov, mullahs Khashirakhun Shaldinov and Khazir Nasinov, and the Lutheran pastor Libikh.

In the Semipalatinskaya Oblast, members of the intelligentsia are taking an active part in atheistic efforts.

Anti-religious lectures by Doctor of Biological Sciences Finkil'shteyn, and scientists Butlyar, Yerkin, Klochkov, Predtechenskiy, Safonov, and many others have been extremely successful. The local author D. Cherepanov has devoted his works entitled Canyon Mist and the play The Falling Star to the exposure of religious narcosis. These works provide their readers and viewers with plenty of food for thought about the evils which men suffer because of religion.

In the Yuzhno-Kazakhstanskaya and certain other oblasts, much popular interest has been aroused by "living magazines" and bulletin board newspapers exposing the charlatanny of servants of the cult. In several cities and rayons of the Kustanayskaya Oblast (the town of Rudnyy and the Semiozernyy and Zabol'skiy Rayons) film lecture halls on scientific-atheistic subjects have been established. In the Gur'yevskaya Oblast, there is a mobile atheistic propaganda unit. The members of the oblast branch of the Society for the Propagation of Political and Scientific Knowledge who accompany this unit appear in the kolkhozes with lectures on such subjects as "Science Exposes Religious Miracles", "The Road to the Cosmos", "The Origin of Islam", "Chemistry in the Service of the People", "What Should a Member of the Communist Society Be Like?" etc. These lectures are followed by slides and motion pictures on anti-religious subjects.

Filmed statements by former believers who broke with religion are presented on various animal farms and distant pastures. The atheists are actively aided in their struggle against the religious narcosis by local akyns (Kazakh's folk poets and singers). In their poetic compositions, these bards expose the machinations of mullahs and persuade the people not to believe in the "holy" charlatans who live off the ignorance of the gullible.

All of these facts demonstrate that experience in scientific-atheistic work has been accumulated by many Party organizations in Kazakhstan. The active endeavors of atheists are bearing excellent fruit. What has been done is not enough, however. The mullahs, priests, and sectarian preachers, aware of the possibility of complete failure have begun to change their tactics. They are using all possible means to hold back the believers. Sparing no expense, they are renovating the churches and enlarging church choirs. The Moslem clergy is imparting a greater air of festivity to its services and is organizing mass pilgrimages to the so-called "holy places".

The following example is indicative. In the village of Burunday of the Alma-Atinskaya Oblast, sect member Levashov decided to break with his sect. In order to avoid persecution, he moved into the capital of the Republic. But his "brothers

in spirit" did not leave him alone. Representatives of the sect were dispatched to Alma-Ata, and having discovered at the public directory office that Levashov was working at the "Kazdoproyekt" Institute, they sent him a letter. Fortunately, it turned out that this was another Levashov-- a Communist. The letter thus reached the rayon Party Committee.

This example of the persistence of sectarian chieftains indicates the tenacity with which they hold on to every man who appears to be slipping from their clutches. This must be counteracted by equally strong measures. Of great help in such work would be wide sharing of the positive experience in scientific-atheistic propaganda among all cities and rayons of the Republic. Unfortunately, Kazakhstan is devoting insufficient attention to this extremely important task. In some of the Party and social organizations, anti-religious propaganda finds itself in an extreme state of stagnation.

Here are the results of such apathy. In the town of Dzhambul, the local Baptist congregation has in the last five years doubled its size right under the noses of Party and Komsomol organizations. It is attracting not only aged individuals, but young people as well. In order to lure boys and girls, the Baptists have organized two choirs. These are made up of young people with secondary and specialized training: two nurses, a sewing teacher, a laboratory technician, a mechanic, and various other factory specialists. Many of them, as it turns out, do not have any special inclination toward religion and would gladly join another fine choral collective; none of the Party or Komsomol leaders, however, even thought of creating such an enterprise.

Nor is scientific-atheistic propaganda being dispensed in many of the villages of Dzhambulskaya Oblast. In the village of Voroshilovka of the Chuyskiy Rayon, the local club and library are functioning poorly and very rarely have interesting evenings, reader conferences, and absorbing discussions. This situation was exploited by the priests, mullahs, and sectarian preachers who have cast out their nets widely over the entire area. The village has teachers, positions, and fulltime Party and Komsomol secretaries who are doing nothing to initiate an active anti-religious propaganda program. Indeed, when the local Party secretary Comrade Shankobayev was asked to explain this passive attitude, he replied:

"I have too many other worries. This is the responsibility of the rayon Party Committee."

We realize of course that the village Communist has many urgent matters on his mind, but there is no excuse for such indifference when right under his nose the religious

obscurantists are crippling the souls of men and tearing them away from socially-useful endeavor!

This attitude of confidence and apathy is also evident among other Party and Soviet workers, in Kazakhstan. One frequently hears them make erroneous and essentially harmful statements that Islam did not make any serious inroads in the Republic, and without any deep roots to support it would in time wither away. But while these "theoreticians" are theorizing, the Moslem sheikhs, mullahs, and ishans are feeling quite secure. They practise open extortion, perform the rite of circumcision, practise magical medicine, and organize pilgrimages to various "holy places".

The Moslem religion aids and abets the most outrageous survivals of the feudal past, and this constitutes a particular danger to society. The practices of bride stealing and forced contractual marriages still exist in Kazakhstan. Not only do such evils go unnoticed, but the outrageous repression of women and their deprivation of human rights frequently receives approval and support instead of reprobation. Such insufferable indifference frequently leads to tragic results. In the Il'yichevskiy of the Yuzhno-Kazakhstanskaya Oblast, a hydraulic technician employed by the construction-assembly administration of Kazkirvodstroy by the name of Rysbekov fell in love with Nasime Abulova. The girl failed to respond to his entreaties. Then Rysbekov with a group of friends decided to steal Nasime away. In resisting the kidnappers, the girl received several knife wounds. Her seventeen-year-old brother Umirzakh tried to help his sister. Enraged, the kidnappers pushed him off the road under the wheels of a moving automobile, and he was killed.

It would seem that everything was quite clear; a serious crime was committed and the guilty ones had to be punished. But the rayon prosecutor Ismailov attempted to classify the death of Umirzakh Abulov as a result of an accident. The Party Committee of the Il'yichevskiy Rayon did nothing to correct the criminal act perpetrated by the prosecutor after receiving a complaint from the victim's mother; and even after the case was investigated by a special commission and the Rayon Committee was forced to bring the matter up for discussion by the bureau, Rysbekov's crime continued to be viewed from the standpoint of relations among families and friends.

This unfortunate matter was set aright only after the intervention of the Party Committee of the Yuzhno-Kazakhstanskaya Oblast.

How is then possible to speak of a lack of Islamic influence after such a case? Such unfounded statements weaken the vigilance of atheists and strengthen the position

of the Moslem clergy.

In many rayons in Kazakhstan, religious rites such as weddings, funerals, and circumcisions, are accompanied by lavish parties and fiestas which inflict a great deal of harm on the national economy. They distract people from work. Here is one result of such feasting. The family of Mirzaraimov, the warehouse director of the "Sazak" kolkhos in Suzakskiy Rayon of the Yuzhno-Kazakhstanskaya, held two feasts in the past year. The last one was attended by about 200 persons, none of whom went to work in the fields that day.

On religious holidays, much harm is done to socialist animal raising enterprises. An enormous number of sheep and goats are slaughtered in the course of the "Kurban-Ayt" sacrificial ceremony alone. According to some rather incomplete data, about 900 sheep and goats were killed in eight villages during 1960. And how great is the total number of cattle killed during this holiday in the entire republic!

Also poorly conducted in the republic is the struggle against acts of charlatanry perpetrated by sheikhs and "mendicant mullahs" who go about robbing the believers in the various "holy places". These lovers of an easy income have entrenched themselves around shrines, burning springs, and other attractions visited by pilgrims, where they unscrupulously rob the gullible illiterates. Pilgrimages are still being conducted to three shrines in Gur'yevskaya Oblast and four shrines in Dzhambul'skaya Oblast, as well as to various "holy places" in the Yuzhno-Kazakhstanskaya Oblast. In the village of Golovachevka, Dzhambul'skaya Oblast, the shrines of "Aysha-Bibi" and "Babadzha-Khatun" are located right on the estate of a sheikh's son. What is even more outrageous is that this estate is twice the size of that usually allotted to collective farmers. The sheikh's son is spreading the story that it was Allah himself who visited him in a dream and commanded him to protect these shrines. And this is precisely what he is doing, without, of course, neglecting his own profit. But what is particularly disgraceful is that up until 1958, the sheikh's son was receiving a government salary for his "services". On the grounds of this curious sanctuary have been erected a mosque and a bunkhouse. The owner of the estate reads the Koran, and with the aid of two assistants, a mendicant mullah and a woman healer, administers various "cures". All of this barefaced charlatanry is going on right under the noses of local Party and Soviet workers who are taking no measures to put an end to it. On the contrary, the son's family enjoys the esteem and respect of the entire community, and his daughter-in-law has even been elected to serve as deputy in the rayon soviet.

With the connivance of the financial agencies, no account is made of large sums of money received by the religionists without having earned it. In the Yuzhno-Kazakhstanskaya Oblast alone, most of the mendicant mullahs do not pay State taxes while the local administrators claim that this is so because of the difficulty of keeping track of their incomes. But the local citizens themselves could help the revenue officers in this task. In the village of Sary-Agach, for example, everyone says openly that the mendicant imam Addukrim has been known to "earn" five sheep for a single trip to a distant pasture.

The indifferent attitude of many Party and social organizations to scientific-atheistic and anti-religious work has given rise to a state of affairs wherein the clergy have found it possible to expand their active core of believers even to include former Communists and people with a higher education. In the Kurdayskiy Rayon of Dzhabul'skaya Oblast, a man by the name of Kal'chukov, a former Party member, kolkhoz chairman, and deputy director of a machine-tractor station, now performs the duties of a mullah! Among the members of the Baptist community in Alma-Ata are geological engineer Klyuzov (a preacher), and deputy chief accountant and the Kaztsvetmet'snab (Kazakh Non-Ferrous Metal Supply Enterprise) Butenko (a choir master).

Of course, participation in religious ceremonies is the private affair of every individual citizen in our country. The Soviet Constitution protects the right to religious freedom. The basic evil, however, lies in the fact that the defenders of these rites and ceremonies are not satisfied in having this individual right, and try to actively propagate religious views, organize collections for religious purposes, and engage in church charity work; all of these things constitute violations of Soviet law.

For this reason, one needs to be able to draw the line between legal and illegal activity and to conduct anti-religious propaganda widely, tactfully, and in such a way that it does not offend the religious sentiments of believers. But in the practice of individual local organs within the Republic, one still encounters cases of outright proscription /literally--"naked administration"/.

There would be far fewer such cases if the Party organizations of Kazakhstan would only institute the practice of systematically regulating and directing atheistic propaganda and extending the positive experience in anti-religious work gained so far.

Party leaders should devote some attention on the experience in individual work with believers gained by atheistic propagandists of the Yesil'skiy Rayon Party Committee.

Vladislav Nikolayevich Nosov. The work of this man has been described in an article appearing in Pravda (Truth). The experiences of this propagandist have aroused interest in the Ukraine, Belorussia, and a number of other republics. It was only Kazakhstan that did not seem to respond. The article in question was not reprinted in a single republican newspaper, nor was it read over the radio.

In its resolution "On the Present State and Measures for Improving Mass Political Efforts Among the Workers of the Stalinskaya Oblast", the Central Committee of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) directed all Party organizations "to take necessary measures for the improvement of scientific-atheistic propaganda". Successful compliance with this Party directive requires the constant improvement and control over the activities of all ideological forces rallied in the struggle against religious survivals, as well as the timely elimination of all shortcomings and errors evident in such work.